

Message Text

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SUBJ: GOP COOPERATING WITH U.S. MILITARY TO REDUCE CANAL ZONE

SQUATTER PROBLEM

SUMMARY. TEAMS MADE UP OF MEMBERS OF U.S. MILITARY, PANAMANIAN NATIONAL GUARD (GN) AND THE GOP'S RURAL SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT INSTITUTION, THE GENERAL DIRECTION FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE COMMUNITY (DIGEDECOM), ON JANUARY 3-7 CONDUCTED AN INTENSIVE SURVEY OF ALL PEASANT SQUATTER SITES WITHIN THE ARMY AND AIR FORCE RESERVES OF THE CANAL ZONE. TWO HUNDRED THIRTY-SEVEN HEADS OF FAMILIES WERE IDENTIFIED AND AN ADDITIONAL 167 SITES WERE DISCOVERED WHICH BORE EVIDENCE OF ILLEGAL USE. PRESS COVERAGE HAS BEEN LIMITED AND MODERATE, STRESSING THE GOP'S COMMITMENT TO THE WELFARE OF THE SQUATTERS, PLANS TO MOVE THEM TO NEW HOUSING COMMUNITIES OUTSIDE THE ZONE, AND THE NECESSITY OF MAINTAINING THE FOREST AREAS OF THE ZONE SO AS TO AVOID DEPLETION OF THE WATERSHED SERVING THE CANAL AND PROVIDING PANAMA CITY'S WATER SUPPLY. NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC AS TO THE RIGHTS OF THESE PANAMANIAN CITIZENS TO RESIDE IN "PANAMANIAN TERRITORY" - WHICH WAS SO EVIDENT A FEW MONTHS AGO IN THE PANAMANIAN PRESS - HAS BEEN NON-EXISTENT RECENTLY. THIS GOP COOPERATION PROMISES TO REDUCE, THOUGH PROBABLY NOT PERMANENTLY ELIMINATE, THE VEXING

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SQUATTER PROBLEM. END SUMMARY.

1. IN RECENT YEARS THE NUMBER OF PANAMANIAN SQUATTERS IN THE CANAL ZONE HAS INCREASED. SQUATTERS ARE PEOPLE RESIDING ILLEGALLY IN THE ZONE AND THOSE WHO LIVE IN NEARBY AREAS UNDER PANAMANIAN JURISDICTION, BUT WHO TRAVEL PERIODICALLY INTO THE ZONE TO CARRY ON SLASH AND BURN AGRICULTURE (WITH DEVASTATING EFFECTS UPON THE ENVIRONMENT). BECAUSE OF PANAMANIAN SENSITIVITIES, EARLIER SUCCESSFUL U.S. GOVERNMENT EVICTION PROCEEDINGS WERE DISCONTINUED AS COUNTERPRODUCTIVE SINCE THEY AROUSED INTENSE HOSTILITY IN THE PANAMANIAN PRESS. SUBSEQUENTLY, LEGAL ORDERS BY ZONE AUTHORITIES COMMANDING THE SQUATTERS TO DEPART WERE IGNORED. AT THE SAME TIME, THESE WERE HIGHLY EFFECTIVE IN TRIGGERING HOSTILE RESPONSES FROM THE PANAMANIAN PRESS WHICH AT VARIOUS TIMES HAS ACCUSED U.S. OF "AGGRESSION AGAINST PANAMANIAN CITIZENS WHOSE ONLY CRIME IS TO FARM PANAMANIAN TERRITORY NOT BEING USED FOR LEGITIMATE CANAL-RELATED ACTIVITIES." WHILE HIGH GOP OFFICIALS PROFESSED UNDERSTANDING OF U.S. CONCERN AND OF THE FACT THAT DEFORESTATION OF CERTAIN CANAL ZONE AREAS WAS NOT IN PANAMA'S INTEREST, POLITICALLY IT WAS DIFFICULT FOR GOP TO APPEAR TO SIDE WITH U.S. AGAINST ITS OWN PEOPLE. AS A RESULT, UNTIL RECENTLY ASSURANCES BY GOP OFFICIALS THAT THEY WOULD DEAL WITH SQUATTER PROBLEM WERE NOT FOLLOWED UP BY ACTION. PROGRESS IN CANAL TREATY NEGOTIATIONS AND THE IMPROVEMENT IN OVERALL U.S.-PANAMANIAN RELATIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR, HOWEVER, HAS MADE IT POLITICALLY FEASIBLE FOR THE GOP TO MOVE TO SOLVE THE SQUATTER PROBLEM.

2. THE FIRST BREAKTHROUGH CAME DECEMBER 24 WHEN THE GOP SPONSORED THE REMOVAL OF SOME 60 FAMILIES FROM THE HEAVILY WOODED AREAS AROUND MADDEN DAM TO THE NEWLY ERECTED VILLA UNIDA HOUSING PROJECT IN NEARBY CHILIBRE. PRESS ACCOUNTS OF THE REMOVAL OF THE SQUATTERS FOCUSED ON THE IMPORTANCE OF MAINTAINING THE ENVIRONMENT SO AS TO AVOID WATER POLLUTION. THE PRESS REPORTED THAT DEFORESTATION HAD ALREADY LED TO SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF SILT REACHING MADDEN LAKE AND CONTINUING ON INTO THE CANAL.

3. THE NEXT STEP INVOLVED THE JANUARY 3-7 SURVEY OF ALL U.S. ARMY AND AIR FORCE RESERVES IN THE ZONE. WITH U.S. HELICOPTER SUPPORT, THE SURVEY TTASM (INCLUDING 84 PANAMANIAN AND 1274 AMERICANS) WERE ABLE TO INSPECT ALL VISIBLE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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SQUATTER SITES IN THESE RESERVES. THEY IDENTIFIED 216 HEADS OF FAMILIES PRESENTLY RESIDING ON U.S. MILITARY RESERVATIONS. IN ADDITION PANAMANIAN OFFICIALS IDENTIFIED AN ADDITIONAL 21 SQUATTERS WHO RESIDE IN A NEARBY PANAMANIAN COMMUNITY AND "DAY FARM" IN THE ZONE. OF THE 216 IDENTIFIED ONLY 23 NAMES WERE FOUND ON PRECIOUS MILITARY LISTS OF SQUATTERS. (THE OLD MASTER LIST HAD CONTAINED 98 NAMES.)

4. PRESENT PLANS CALL FOR THE LARGEST GROUP OF SQUATTERS, THOSE OCCUPYING THE PACIFIC SIDE WEST BANK AREAS BORDERING THE PAN AMERICAN HIGHWAY NEAR ARRAIJAN, TO BE REMOVED TO GOP-PROVIDED HOUSING IN CHILIBRE NEXT MAY OR JUNE. THE REMAINDER OF THE SQUATTERS IN ALL THE OTHER ZONE MILITARY AREAS WOULD HOPEFULLY BE TRANSFERRED TO CHILIBRE IN NOVEMBER, ALL TRANSFERS BEING CONTINGENT UPON THE COMPLETION OF ADDITIONAL HOUSING.

5. COMMENT. THE TURNABOUT IN THE GOP ATTITUDE ON SQUATTER REMOVAL HAS BEEN REMARKABLE AND ILLUSTRATIVE AGAIN OF HOW POSITIONS LOCKED IN CONCRETE BY NATIONALISTIC RHETORIC CAN BE REVERSED ALMOST OVERNIGHT WHERE THE POLITICAL DESIRE IS PRESENT. IN THIS CASE, INCREASED CONFIDENCE BY THE GOP IN U.S. INTENTIONS TO REACH A SATISFACTORY AGREEMENT ON A NEW CANAL TREATY AND THE OVERALL IMPROVEMENT IN U.S.-PANAMANIAN RELATIONS DURING THE PAST YEAR MADE IT POLITICALLY FEASIBLE FOR THE GOP TO TAKE PREVIOUSLY UNPOPULAR ACTION IN COOPERATION WITH THE U.S. DESPITE THE GOP'S NEW-FOUND POLITICAL WILL TO DEAL WITH THE PROBLEM, A PERMANENT SOLUTION MAY NOT BE ACHIEVED FOR SOME TIME. THE HUMANITARIAN WAY THE AUTHORITIES ARE HANDLING THE REMOVAL OF THE PRESENT SQUATTERS MAY STIMULATE AN INFLOW OF NEW SQUATTERS. SOME PEOPLE MAY PERCEIVE THAT THEY CAN GET PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT IN PEASANT HOUSING PROJECTS IN PANAMA IF THEY INVADE AND SUBSEQUENTLY ARE REMOVED FROM CANAL ZONE LANDS. CLOSE CANAL ZONE-GN COOPERATION WILL BE NECESSARY TO PREVENT NEW SQUATTERS FROM SETTING UP HOUSEKEEPING ON ZONE LANDS.
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